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## Parents Awarded \$5 Million in Suit Against Son's Killer

*Courts: Victim was shot to death by an acquaintance, who was acquitted after being charged with murder.*

January 29, 1999 | DAVID HALDANE, TIMES STAFF WRITER

In what one of the plaintiffs described Thursday as "an O.J. Simpson-type case," the parents of an Orange County man shot to death by an acquaintance in late 1995 have won \$5 million in a wrongful death lawsuit.

"We are just extremely happy and gratified," said Dave Wilk, the stepfather of Tyler Hutchison, who grew up in San Clemente and died in San Luis Obispo at the age of 26. "For the last three years we have been fighting for justice."

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Hutchison was founder of a Newport Beach in-line skating products company called Boulderblades Inc. On the night he died, he had gone to San Luis Obispo on a business trip and spent the evening with Mark Westwick, whom he had known since college.

After a night of drinking and telephoning friends, according to court testimony, Westwick shot Hutchison in the head. He then wrapped the body in a sleeping bag, which he hid in the basement, drove Westwick's car to Inglewood, took a cab to Oxnard and called his mother, who picked him up and drove him back to San Luis Obispo.

Not until two days after the shooting did Westwick report the incident to police.

Westwick, who was charged with murder, testified during a nine-week trial in 1997 that the shooting had been an accident and that, confused, he had been trying to tell Hutchison's grandparents in Dana Point of the incident before informing authorities. He was acquitted.

But Hutchison's parents felt that justice had not been served and filed a lawsuit in 1997. "It was really a travesty," Wilk said Thursday. "He should have been found guilty of involuntary manslaughter."

Under the civil judgment, awarded by a jury in San Luis Obispo Superior Court Wednesday, Hutchison's biological parents--William Hutchison of Bullhead City, Ariz., and Terryle Wilk of Solvang, Calif., will receive \$3 million for the wrongful infliction of death and \$2 million for emotional distress caused by the delay in reporting the incident.

Barbara Jorgensen, Mark Westwick's mother, said Thursday that her son has been in therapy ever since the shooting. "This has been very difficult," she said. "It was a tragic accident. My hope is that this judgment will give the family the peace and closure they deserve. Our hearts go out to them--this has been very tragic for both families."

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